

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 15

BOSTON GLOBE
26 October 1984

Seeking an answer to terrorism

WILLIAM BEECHER

WASHINGTON - Adm. Stansfield Turner, a former director of the CIA, was addressing the flap over a pamphlet advising anti-government guerrillas in Nicaragua on political assassinations and other dirty tricks.

He told reporters at a breakfast meeting this week that one of the problems was the Administration's recall to active service of "a lot of oldtime [CIA] employees," some of whom "have not been able to adapt" to the new restrictions on covert warfare.

It wasn't so many years ago when the CIA was running the Phoenix program during the Vietnam war. For those with short memories, that was a program which in effect adopted the Viet Cong's tactics of terrorism and assassination against its own infrastructure; of fighting fire with fire.

A succession of recent Presidents, by executive order, have barred assassinations, either directly by American operatives or by their foreign hirelings or associates.

The issue came up again in the televised campaign debate between Ronald Reagan and Walter Mondale. The President tried to lay the blame at the doorstep of a CIA contract employee who was hired to teach tactics to the Contras and, he implied, overzealously produced a how-to pamphlet that contravened national policy. Higher-ups excised some particu-

larly egregious aspects, Reagan said, but somehow 12 copies of the original draft got out.

Subsequent reporting, however, makes clear that the advice on "neutralizing" Sandinista judges, security officials and others was not deleted. Guerrilla fighters certainly understand that neutralization does not mean social shunning or house arrest.

It is, of course, relatively easy and correct for a civilized society to condemn assassination as a tool of national policy in a situation such as the covert war in Nicaragua.

But that answer is not so easy in the case of state-sponsored terrorism, such as the truck-bombings of American diplomatic and military installations in Beirut. US officials are trying to come up with appropriate responses.

President Reagan, as he took office at a moment when the nation was frustrated over the hostage trauma in Iran, vowed that terrorists would no longer be free to strike at American personnel, facilities and interests without being visited with swift and harsh retaliation. That was before the acts of terrorism in Beirut.

In this week's TV debate, Mondale said: "The terrorists have won each time. The President told the terrorists that he was going to retaliate. He didn't. They called [his] bluff. And the bottom line is: the United States left in humiliation, and our enemies are stronger."

To which Reagan responded:

"I'm tempted to ask you what you would do We are busy trying to find the centers where these operations stem from and retaliation will be taken. But we are not going to simply kill some people to say, 'Oh, look, we got even.'"

Officials charged with trying to find meaningful answers are nearly stumped. To be sure, they are trying to improve their intelligence. They are also urging Syria to block the movement of explosives to radical Shiites and Iranians in Lebanon, and Israel to pursue its own counterterrorist interests there.

But they know that to simply bomb a suspected terrorist training center near Baalbeck, Lebanon, may kill some innocent bystanders and perhaps lead to an escalation of anti-US violence throughout the Mideast and beyond. If the evidence should show that the truck-bombings were masterminded, say, in Tehran, should they consider sending bombers or assassins there?

Would that be moral, legal, justifiable or effective? Would stern private warnings suffice or be laughed off as a sign of weakness?

To the extent that state-directed terrorism increasingly becomes viewed as a low-risk, high-payoff, politically potent alternative to war-making against a strong, civilized society, it presents a threat that demands an answer - and not just television repartee.

William Beecher is the Globe's diplomatic correspondent.